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INFORMATION

FEB 24 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Secretary Rogers' Report from Nigeria

Secretary Rogers reports on what he thinks to be a critical meeting with General Gowon:

On U.S. - Nigeria Relations

The Secretary reports that U.S. - Nigerian relations obviously have been strained as a result of our neutrality and sympathies expressed by many Americans and the press for Biafra during the Civil War. Pressures on relief since the war have added to the strain. Secretary Rogers believes the Nigerians sincerely want to get over these difficulties and seek improved relations.

Gowon stressed that Nigeria purchased Soviet arms during the war only because they could not buy from the U.S. and the U.K. Secretary Rogers believes the Nigerians are sincere in their affirmation that Communism is foreign to their policy. He assured them that our policy toward Nigeria would not be motivated by concern over their attitude toward Communism.

General Gowon was pleased with your invitation to visit the United States and accepted it in principle. The Secretary believes we should quietly seek to assure that the visit occurs when the time is propitious.

On Relief and Reconstruction

Gowon believes the relief problem is under control and wants to shift emphasis to rehabilitation and reconstruction by April. Secretary Rogers assured Gowon that our only interest was to be helpful and that we want to do so in ways Nigeria desires. The Secretary believes the relief problem is undoubtedly larger than the Nigerians in Lagos believe though not as extensive as some in the U.S. believe. The Secretary reports that the Embassy is clear on our objectives. He believes, however, that the Embassy should be given maximum flexibility to deal with the situation and our public involvement should be kept in as low key as possible in light of Nigerian sensitivities. The Secretary hopes that we can give the increased aid Nigeria wants on a program basis to give Nigeria flexibility within an overall program agreeable to us.

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FOR PRESIDENT FROM SECRETARY

1. I HAD WHAT I THINK WAS A CRITICAL MEETING WITH GENERAL GOWON IN NIGERIA. US-NIGERIAN RELATIONS HAVE OBVIOUSLY BEEN STRAINED AS A RESULT OF OUR NEUTRALITY DURING THE CIVIL WAR, AND THE SYMPATHY FOR BIAFRA OF SO MANY AMERICANS AND PRESS MEDIA. THE STRAIN HAS BEEN ADDED TO DURING THE RELIEF PHASE AFTER THE WAR AS OUR EXPERTS HAVE CONTINUED TO PRESS THE NIGERIANS ABOUT SERIOUS STARVATION PROBLEMS. GENERAL GOWON AND HIS ADVISERS TOLD ME THEY BELIEVE THE RELIEF PROBLEM IS UNDER CONTROL AND THEY WANT TO SHIFT INTO A REHABILITATION AND RECONSTRUCTION EMPHASIS BY APRIL.
2. MOST OF THE REACTIONS TO OUR ATTITUDES WERE EXPRESSED TO ME BY ADMIRAL WEY, COL. JOHNSON (GOVERNOR OF LAGOS STATE) AND COMMISSIONER OKUNNO PRIOR TO MY MEETING WITH GEN. GOWON. I BELIEVE IT WAS ORGANIZED THAT WAY. EACH OF THEM STRESSED THE DESIRE OF NIGERIA FOR CLOSE TIES WITH THE US. BUT EACH OF THEM ALSO STRESSED NIGERIAN PUBLIC OPINION HAD BEEN SEVERELY DISAPPOINTED IN OUR ATTITUDES DURING THE WAR--REFUSAL TO LET THEM PURCHASE WEAPONS AND OUR DECLARATION OF "NEUTRALITY". SO THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT CONSIDERABLE DAMAGE HAS OCCURRED IN OUR RELATIONS.
3. ON THE OTHER HAND, I ALSO AM CONFIDENT THEY WANT TO GET OVER THIS DIFFICULTY AS MUCH AS WE DO. THE KEYNOTE TO THIS WAS GEN. GOWON'S STATEMENT AT THE END OF OUR MEETING (TWO HOURS) THAT HE "CHERISHED THE EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH THE US -- THAT NIGERIA HAD ALWAYS TAKEN FOR GRANTED." THE GENERAL ALSO SAID PUBLICLY AT THE CLOSE OF OUR DISCUSSION THAT OUR VISIT

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- 2 -

MONROVIA 0846

"AUGURED" WELL FOR THE FUTURE OF US-FMG RELATIONS. GOWON DID NO MORE THAN ALLUDE TO THE STRAINS, BUT HE DID TALK CONSIDERABLY ABOUT THE PROBLEMS THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS CAUSED BY DISTORTING INFORMATION.

4. GOWON WAS PLEASED WITH YOUR INVITATION AND ACCEPTED IT IN PRINCIPLE NOTING HE HAD BEEN TO THE US ONCE BEFORE. DETAILS CAN BE FOLLOWED UP THROUGH THE EMBASSY WHEN THE TIME COMES. I THINK THE VISIT WOULD BE AN EXCELLENT WAY TO OVERCOME THE STRAINS AND BELIEVE WE SHOULD QUIETLY SEEK TO ASSURE IT COMES ABOUT.

5. NIGERIA WOULD LIKE INCREASED U.S. AID TO HELP THEM RECONSTRUCT. THEY MENTIONED ROADS, BRIDGES, PORT DEVELOPMENT AND PRE-FABRICATED BUILDINGS FOR DISPLACED PERSONS. THEY WOULD LIKE AID ON A "PROGRAM" RATHER THAN "PROJECT" BASIS, WHICH WILL GIVE THEM MORE FLEXIBILITY IN HOW THEY SPEND IT (WITHIN AN OVERALL PROGRAM AGREEABLE TO US. I HOPE WE CAN DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS ON THE BASIS OF SPECIAL POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION, AS IT WOULD ALSO HELP RESTORE OUR POSITION.

6. GOWON AND OTHERS STRESSED THAT THEIR PURCHASE OF SOVIET ARMS ONLY CAME ABOUT BECAUSE THEY COULD NOT BUY FROM THE U.S. OR U.K. AND THAT COMMUNISM WAS FOREIGN TO NIGERIAN POLICY. I BELIEVE THAT THEY WERE SINCERE. I ASSURED THEM OUR POLICY WOULD NOT BE MOTIVATED BY CONCERN ABOUT THEIR INTENTIONS RE COMMUNISM AND THAT WE UNDERSTOOD THEIR PURCHASES.

7. I ASSURED GOWON THAT OUR ONLY INTEREST WAS TO BE HELPFUL AND THAT WE WANTED TO DO SO IN THE WAYS THAT THEY DESIRED. I THINK HE APPRECIATED OUR ATTITUDE AND THE DIFFICULTIES OF OUR FREE PRESS AND PUBLIC OPINION, THEY ARE AWARE THAT BIAFRAN PUBLIC INFORMATION ACTIVITIES IN THE US WERE MUCH BETTER THAN THEIR OWN.

8. THERE UNDOUBTEDLY IS A LARGER RELIEF PROBLEM IN THE BIAFRAN-HELD AREAS THAN THEY SEEM TO BELIEVE IN LAGOS, THOUGH PROBABLY NOT AS EXTENSIVE AS SOME AT HOME BELIEVE. WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO HELP TO MEET THAT AS BEST WE CAN. HOWEVER, THEY ARE EXTRAORDINARILY SENSITIVE ABOUT THEIR SOVEREIGNTY AND THEIR OWN RESPONSIBILITY AND TIRING OF HEARING

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- 3 -

MONROVIA 0846

FOREIGNERS TELLING THEM WHAT TO DO. IF WE PRESS OUR OWN JUDGMENTS ON THEM TOO STRONGLY EITHER THROUGH DIPLOMATIC OR TECHNICAL CHANNELS, IT WILL HAVE LASTING NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON OUR RELATIONS. THE EMBASSY IS CLEAR ON OUR OBJECTIVES AND ON THE STATE OF OUR PUBLIC OPINION, BUT I BELIEVE WE MUST LEAVE THEM MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY AND KEEP OUR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN AS LOW KEY AS POSSIBLE.

9. I HAVE JUST RECEIVED PRESS COVERAGE REPORTS FROM LAGOS. THEY WERE STRAIGHTFORWARD AND, IN MOST CASES, FRIENDLY.

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